

Entanglements by Rae Armantrout, Wesleyan University Press, 2017. 52p. paper \$6.95 • Pulitzer Prize-winner, Rae Armantrout's latest chapbook, *Entanglements*, is a slim but profound collection about physics. At 4 x 6, it's the size of a large index card. In her "Note to the Reader," Armantrout explains that these poems touch on "the baffling way two particles can become entangled," and certainly the collection is a splendid marriage of science and poetry. With Armantrout's usual short lines, the use of * or numbers between sections, and the lack of page numbers, the reader feels the letters and words themselves are particles acting on both each other and on the white space.

Lines such as, "for the lonely, / direction is meaningless" and "Why is it that / for it / to be in- / finitely large / is terrific, / but to be / infinitely small / is just / unthinkable?" ring densely true, but surprising mentions of Tony Soprano and CSI are also used to contemplate physics.

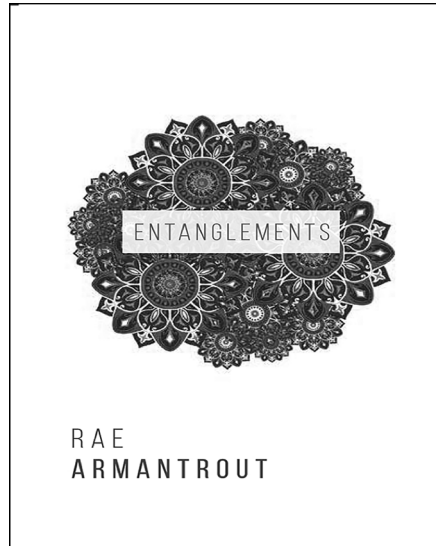
In sparse lines like, "Metaphor / is ritual sacrifice. / It kills the look-alike," Armantrout creates meaning in concision, whereas many poets require a whole poem for a similar feat. Although *Entanglements* is a quick, alluring read, the unsparing poems merit rereading, meditation, and research.

Now/Here by Crystal Spring Gibbins, Holy Cow! Press, 2017, 59p. paper \$16.00 • Set in the Lake of the Woods surrounded by wind, weather, and water, readers encounter history and landscape in Crystal Spring Gibbins' first full-length collection, *Now/Here*. Reminiscent of Mary Oliver, many poems use the imperative of prayer or meditation, like the opening poem, "Credo," which serves as an invocation to the land: "Let the loons lift. Let the past recede / which owes nothing to memory." In most literatures, north is often depicted as a region of hardship and dramatic weather, and Gibbins captures the climate completely with lines like: "blood stroke / of lightning" and "[t]he wind so angry / you can't be." A sense of awe and wonder ebbs from landscape to observer.

Synecdoche

BRIEF BOOK REVIEWS

RACHEL MORGAN



A spirit of exploration dominates, particularly in the last section where the border between land and water is wonderfully problematic. With over 4,500 islands in the Lake of the Woods region, as well as the demarcation between two countries, drawing a line is an environmental and political act: "They stop to rest because the map / in their hands does not translate the path." And it is in this boundary of land and lake, past and future, settled and wild, where *Now/Here* radiates. Several poems in this collection find their genesis in the notebooks of explorers or travelers, but with most regions of the earth charted, Gibbins illustrates that it's the remote and difficult places, which reliably yield secrets and astonishment.

Gibbins knows ecopoetry must be absent of man, as well as urgent. One poem is narrated from the point of view of a river, and other list poems give literal voice to "shell" or "fog." The eponymous poem, "Now/Here," placed exactly in the middle of the collection, describes a city encroaching: "Let the mechanized diggers / cough and choke, while slowly / working over nature." *Now/Here* is a paradoxically stormy but serene collection that celebrates

our increasingly rare and quickly dissolving wild places.

American Purgatory by Rebecca Gayle Howell, Eyewear Publishing, 2017, 60p. paper \$14.49 • Selected by Don Share as the winner of the 2016 Sexton Prize for poetry, *American Purgatory* is Howell's latest collection, and its prophetic verse is ripe for the current political and environmental climate of crisis. The short narrative poems are set in a purgatory that is part postapocalyptic and part colonial. Drought, "herbicide warfare," and a broken economy are the backdrop to a world filled with the motifs of snakes, a burning sun, and fallow fields.

The narrator, who falls in love with a performer preacher, Slade, works the land with other members of the colony: The Kid and Little. The agricultural labor echoes the plight of contemporary migrant workers and the plantation work of American slavery: "[t]he planes sprayed for weevils / . . . The air rots out there." Water is a coveted resource in this dystopia: "When a well does dry up, some people / thirst; others drink dirt."

Howell curates a range of rhetorics, from hymn lyrics, to biblical language, to tautological titles such as: "We Do Not Know What We Do Not Know" and "The Risk Is There Is No Risk." Perhaps the most striking is her creation of "visual poems," black and white collages created from colonial-era images.

Purgatory is a state of suffering, souls experiencing punishment before an eternal reward—a place of limbo, which Howell captures perfectly in lines like: "That's what / it means to owe a thing. It means you are owned. / And which are you, now, the owner or the owned."

With echoes of Phil Levine, Zora Neale Hurston, and Cormac McCarthy, Howell reconstructs hope after the decimation of the American Dream. After all, purgatory is a temporary space, and in the last poem, "Everyone Was Born Here," birth pains pass to promise: "O the new rooms of rain. / We will float and drink years of rain." *American Purgatory* is a vital collection that could easily be situated in contemporary headlines; its acumen is that of warning and survival. □